

November 6, 2000

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT LETTER

**SOLICITATION FOR PROPOSALS TO ESTABLISH
REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS**

1. This Information Letter announces the opportunity for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities to submit proposals for establishing Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Centers with focus on research in high priority areas relevant to the rehabilitation needs of veterans. ***NOTE:** Required formats and instructions for submitting applications are provided in Attachments A.*
2. This solicitation will not support Centers based predominantly at non-VA sites.
3. Funding for six VA RR&D Centers expires 9/30/02. Each of these Centers must submit an application for competitive renewal. Applications from new sites will be reviewed as well. Funding for up to 2 new VA RR&D Centers is expected.
4. VA RR&D Centers are intended to be a resource, first, for the veterans served by VA, especially by the host VA medical facility and, second, for the rehabilitation community at large. They are expected to provide cutting edge solutions to the issues of chronic impairment. It is anticipated that Centers will establish and cultivate a community of VA clinical scientists and scholars within the VA healthcare system for the purpose of pursuing specific research objectives in accord with a well reasoned 5-year plan. Centers are to develop an integrated thematic research core as a unifying focus of research activities. They are expected to:
 - a. Become nationally recognized "Centers of Excellence" in a selected area of research relevant to veterans with disabilities.
 - b. Successfully leverage core support funding through nationally competed and scientifically reviewed funding vehicles: VA investigator-initiated programs, Federal granting agency programs, private foundation awards, and collaborations with commercial partners.
 - c. Mentor and support young investigators, both clinician and nonclinician scientists, through pre- and post-doctoral programs and recruit them into VA.
 - d. Nurture a strong interface with the appropriate VA medical facility clinical services engaged in rehabilitation, long-term management of impairment, and overall quality of life issues.
 - e. Maintain collaborative partnerships of mutual benefit to VA, the VA medical facility, and the supporting community institutions (e.g., schools of medicine, allied health sciences and/or engineering as applicable to research focus).
 - f. Facilitate effective information dissemination for a broad spectrum of audiences.

g. Foster the integration of research findings into clinical practice throughout the health care delivery system.

h. Actively participate in the national consortium of VA RR&D Centers to strengthen natural collaborative bonds and advance VA RR&D in the scientific community and national consciousness.

5. Current foci of RR&D Centers are: Wheelchair and Related Technology; Geriatric Rehabilitation; Functional Electrical Stimulation; Brain Injury Rehabilitation; Healthy Aging with a Disability; Mobility; Rehabilitative Auditory Research; Amputation, Prosthetics and Limb Loss Prevention; and Restoration of SCI & Multiple Sclerosis.

6. VA RR&D emphasizes and funds research in the following broad priority areas: Prosthetics, Orthotics and Orthopedic Rehabilitation; Neurological Dysfunction and SCI Restoration/Rehabilitation; Geriatric Rehabilitation; Visual and Hearing Impairment Rehabilitation; Rehabilitation Engineering; Rehabilitation Outcomes. Proposed research foci must be in a rehabilitation area of importance to the veteran population with evidence of near term applicability. Encouraged areas of emphasis include, but are not limited to:

a. Low Vision/Blind Rehabilitation.

b. Technologies for Successful Aging.

c. Evidence Based Rehabilitation (Rehabilitation Outcomes) and Physiologic Techniques for Validating Outcomes.

d. Creative Approaches to NeuroRehabilitation and/or Neurologic Repair: Stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, Degenerative Neurologic Disorders.

7. Any VA medical facility (or consortium of VA medical facilities) with significant rehabilitation research capacity and with well-established academic partnerships is encouraged to apply. Maximum RR&D awards of core funding will be up to \$750,000 annually, with required competitive renewal on a 5-year cycle.

8. Each Center will have a Director and Associate Director for Research with doctoral degrees and at least a 5/8th VA appointment. Either the Director or Associate Director must be a clinician with medical care funds committed by the host VA Medical Center in support of clinician salary. The medical and scientific leadership team is expected to:

a. Identify research goals and objectives within a given focus area and direct research plans towards achievement of specified goals and objectives. Research plans should include collaborative activities.

b. Create a 5-year program plan for research with specific outcomes aimed at discovering new knowledge, processes and assistive technology that directly influence clinical practice.

c. Achieve maximal administrative efficiencies, control and reporting capabilities, project monitoring, and leveraging of limited core support funds at local and national levels.

d. Support the growth and enhancement of a vigorous and creative "learning environment."

e. Maintain Information Dissemination Activities that promote findings from VA RR&D Centers.

9. RR&D Center proposals will be scientifically merit reviewed to objectively determine relevance of the proposed research to the veteran population, capability of applicant to meet intended outcome of proposed research program, and potential contribution of proposed research to the field of rehabilitation, long-term management of impairment, and overall quality of life issues for veterans with disabilities. Criteria for review and evaluation are:

a. **Strength of Proposed Research Focus.** Includes the:

- (1) Relevance to veteran population,
- (2) Relationship of proposed research activities to announced research focus,
- (3) Potential of proposed research to produce new and useful information,
- (4) Clarity and achievability of research plan, and
- (5) Contribution to overall VA RR&D portfolio.

b. **Effectiveness of Operating Plan.** Includes the:

- (1) Achievability of intended research outcomes,
- (2) Workability of proposed collaborations and evidence of their benefit to VA,
- (3) Feasibility of evaluation and quality assurance methods,
- (4) Sufficient coverage of all required disciplines,
- (5) Ability to build research capacity within VA, and
- (6) Effectiveness of plan to disseminate research findings.

c. **Adequacy of Resources.** Includes the:

(1) Scientific strength of current VA Research and Development (R&D) Program, especially in rehabilitation research,

(2) Vitality of rehabilitation clinical base within VA medical facility,

(3) Support and commitment of VA medical facility(s) and cited affiliations,

(4) Demonstrated scientific leadership of key personnel at VA,

(5) Evidence of VA-based core of investigators, and

(6) Adequacy of VA facilities and equipment.

d. **Budget and Cost Effectiveness.** Include the:

(1) Ability to support program activities,

(2) Reasonableness of costs, and

(3) Appropriateness and detail of subcontract budget (if required).

10. General guidelines for applicants are:

a. All Center funding awards are contingent on availability of funds.

b. All applicants must submit a **Notification of Intent to Apply by January 16, 2001.** Notification must be directed through the ACOS/Research and include names of key investigators, certification from the facility that the principal investigators have at least 5/8th VA appointments, certification that space will be provided at the VA facility to support the proposed center and one paragraph outlining the proposed emphasis. The notification will be used for review planning purposes only.

c. All applications must be reviewed by the appropriate R&D Committees and appropriate Human Subject, Animal Safety and BioSafety Subcommittees.

d. Applicant sites may be a single VA medical facility or a consortium of collaborating VA medical facilities. Consortium applicants must identify a lead site with a well-established academic partnership. Organizational relationships and responsibilities of consortia are to be clearly delineated.

e. Scientifically approved proposals will require administrative site visits in advance of making definitive funding determinations.

f. The Director and Associate Director must be eligible to receive VA research support (eligibility must be established prior to submission of the proposal).

g. Annual (non-competing) progress reports for the Center will be reviewed administratively by RR&D Service to monitor performance against stated program plans. **NOTE:** *Unsatisfactory performance will result in probationary status or termination of funding.*

11. The timeline for proposal submission, review and award is:

a. Notification of intent to apply (see 10.b.)	01//16/01
b. Proposals due in VHA Headquarters (attachment A)	03/06/01
c. Review	04/01
d. Administrative site visits	
(1) New Centers	05/01
(2) Established Centers (Renewed Awards)	08/01
e. Final Notification of Awards	
(1) New Centers	06/01/01
(2) Established Centers (Renewed Awards)	09/28/01
f. Funding Begins	
(1) New Centers	07/01/01
(2) Established Centers (Renewed Awards)	10/01/02

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12. Questions concerning this solicitation for proposals may be directed to: Laura Bowman, RR&D Service, at 202-408-3680 or E-Mail, bowlau@mail.va.gov.

John R. Feussner, M.D.
Chief Research and Development Officer

Attachment

DISTRIBUTION: CO: E-mailed 11/28/2000
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 - FAX 11/28/2000
EX: Boxes 104, 88, 63, 60, 54, 52, 47 and 44 - FAX 11/28/2000

ATTACHMENT A

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION
REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS**

1. General. Whether preparing a first-time or competing renewal application, the proposal must be well organized, clearly presented, and complete without presumption of reliance on previous proposal submissions or of assumed public common knowledge.

2. VA Forms 10-1313-1 through 8, Merit Review Application. VA Forms 10-1313-1 through 8, are to be used for Center proposals. Forms are available through each VA facility's Office of Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research and Development (R&D), or equivalent.

3. Content Order:

a. A Form 10-1313-1, Merit Review Application, provides brief identifying information. Items which may require clarification are:

(1) Items 1, 2 and 4. Leave blank.

(2) Item 3. Review group should be identified as "Center."

(3) Items 5 and 6. For applications proposing consortia, identify lead site.

(4) Item 9. List the Center Director as Principal Investigator (PI), Associate Director as Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI).

(5) Item 10. Center title should be short and easily identify program and its focus.

(6) Item 11. Amount requested should be for fiscal years.

b. VA Form 10-1313-2, Summary Description of Program, provides a brief narrative scientific abstract not to exceed 500 words. List key words that best describe the program's scientific disciplines and research focus.

c. Table of Contents

d. Narrative should not exceed 20 pages. *NOTE: This page limit does not include VA forms or appendixes. Components expected to be contained in the narrative include:*

(1) A discussion of intended research directions and the proposed methods for implementing them. Show how each group of related research will contribute sequentially or cumulatively to the resolution of practical rehabilitation problems. Discuss focus in relation to health care needs of the veteran population, VA medical center and/or Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) mission, and the mission of VA's R&D. Describe how current programs and affiliations complement focus. Review current status of nation's research in this area. Identify expected outcomes of proposed research direction.

(2) The present proposed Center organization and staffing plan showing lines of authority and communication and describing operational responsibility. Explain how components will interface. Discuss planned interaction with university and other community affiliations, showing purpose and mutual benefit of interaction. Outline any planned formal mechanisms for information dissemination. Detail program evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms. Identify administrative controls. Justify and include a copy of all formal agreements with non-VA institutions in Appendixes.

(3) Discuss available resources. Identify clinical activities at the hospital that would provide a base for research. Discuss current Rehabilitation R&D Program and highlight successful investigations in this area. Describe available VA physical facilities and program equipment. Identify academic affiliation contributions in the areas of personnel, equipment and opportunities for learning.

e. VA Forms 10-1313-3, Current Funds and First Year Request for Program, and VA Form 10-1313-4, Estimated Expenses of Program, are to be used to submit proposed 5-year budget.

f. VA Forms 10-1313-5, Investigator's Biographic Sketch, and VA Form 10-1313-6, Investigator's Bibliography, are to be used to provide biographical sketches and a list of up to ten recent or significant publications for each of the Center's key VA and non-VA collaborating staff. Up to five manuscripts reprints may be included as appendixes.

g. VA Form 10-1313-7, Investigator's Total VA and Non-VA Research Support and VA Form 10-1313-8, Summary Statement Abstract and Budget Summary, are to be used to list each person's current and pending total VA and non-VA research support.

4. **Appendixes.** Appendixes are to be identified and labeled. Include letters of commitment and memoranda of understanding with collaborating institutions as appendixes. Letter of commitment from VA medical facility Director is required for review. For consortium applications, a letter from each participating facility's Director is to be included. Letters of support from elected officials should not be solicited nor included.

5. **Authorization To Share Materials For Review.** It is expected that proposals will be reviewed by VA and non-VA reviewers. Append the following statement, signed by the PI and Co-PI: VA is authorized to share copies of all materials included in this application, for the purpose of scientific merit review."

6. Submit the original application plus 20 copies of the proposal to:

Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (122A), Office of Research and Development, Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420

7. Copies are to be duplicated back to back. With the exception of special forms, standard 8 1/2" x 11" white paper is to be used. Proposals are to be typed in no less than 11 point type, single-spaced with a 1 inch binder margin on all edges. Consecutively number pages in lower right corner.

8. Proposals which are received after **March 6, 2001** will not be reviewed.